

Testimony on Senate Bill 894, an Act concerning County Boards of Education and Computer Science Courses

Submitted to the Maryland Senate Committee on Education, Health and Environmental Affairs

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My name is Sophia Bostian and I'm a fifth grader from Butterfly Ridge Elementary School in Frederick. I am a Girls Who Code member and I am asking you to support Senate Bill 894.

Last year I was in my first coding club. It was almost all boys. And most weeks, I was the only girl in the room. I didn't like how the boys were bossy and took over. They didn't want to work with me. So, I would usually take my work to a corner, by myself. But I loved coding. I even asked my parents to get me a Lego set I could code for my birthday.

The day I got the permission slip for Girls Who Code, I went home and asked my mom 'why is it *girls* who code and not just *kids* who code? Why is it just for girls?' She said it was because girls don't always have the opportunity to be in this type of club. I understood. She also said some people thought boys were better than girls at computer science. I thought that was crazy!

On my first day with Girls Who Code, I knew it was going to be different. The other girls wanted to work with me. We did team bonding activities together. We even did an activity where we all mixed up our hands and tried to untangle ourselves to make a circle - it was fun and we couldn't stop laughing until we finally got into our circle. I felt more comfortable with my peers.

This club has had a huge impact on me. We've never had the boys take over and push us out and we're able to stick together and focus on our projects. Recently, we've been working on a Lego elephant. We've made him walk and his trunk even moves. We're hoping that we can program him to make elephant noises soon too. We all work together - so we can support each other and learn from each other. Just having *girls* in the club has given me a chance to pursue my interests.

To me, coding is a chance to be yourself. It's about taking a chance on yourself and on others. It means seeing how the choices you make affect how something works and it means learning how to build things.

I recently had the chance to meet Dr. Mae Jemison, the first African-American woman to travel to space. It was so great to meet her. She says "The level of confidence women are able to build in women-only groups is important." That's what Girls Who Code gave me. It's been a great opportunity to learn with girls who have the same interests as me and support each other.

To bring more girls into coding, we need to not only offer them computer science classes, but we need to make sure they are taking them. We need to have data of who is taking these classes. I hope the representatives of Maryland will pass this bill, so more girls will have the opportunity to enjoy coding like me.